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THE

L OF THE GODS

A TRAGEDY IN FOUR ACTS.

"The mill of the Gods grinds slowly,
Yet they grind exceeding small,
Though he sit with patience and wait,
With exactness grinds he all."

BY J. L. HEMPSTEAD

MEMPHIS, TENN.

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The Mill of the Gods.

Scene in a village street. Enter citizens.

Ivan.—Alas, that dear old Saxon England should tempt this Norman robber to land upon our peaceful shores!

Winfred.—You have truly said; the coming of these hated invaders has wrought us little good.

Alvan.—Our lands are overrun; our strongholds, mountain fastness, fertile vales, all tell the selfsame tale; the cursed steel-clad warriors everywhere.

Ivan.—This Norman William sits securely on a Saxon throne. His conquest is complete, while we, with abject fear, supinely bear his yoke.

Winfred.—What else can we do; we have no leader bold enough to face these warlike French, whose very trade is butchery?

Alvan.—There is Herward, the Varanguan, of Saxon blood, kingly, too, at that, direct from brave and gentle Alfred's.

Ivan.—Degenerate son of a noble sire. He is like all our present race, fit only to be ruled by Normans.

Winfred.—What mean you, an insult to our fair-haired race? (Places his hand on his sword.)

Ivan.—Peace, good fool! I meant thee no offence. Herward's blood needs thickening, that is all; besides, who will rouse him, since he's married to a Norman dame, from yonder castle, that frowns upon our humble homes.

Alvan.—Alas, it is too true! The whispering winds, from every corner of our land, come ladened with the neighing of their steeds.

IVAN.—(Peers intently in the distance) Who comes this way? (All turn and look.) Hath burning hell disgorged, given back to Mother Earth its very queen? By my troth, I believe me it is so!

ENTER HULDA, *an old hag, with disheveled locks, slow and tottering step.*

WINFRED A very witch, with sulphurous smell, to vanish, and be seen no more, with curses for a legacy. May good St. George deliver us!

IVAN.—Speak, old woman! What ill-timed gale has wafted thee to us?

HULDA.—I have traveled far, good men, and only seek a little rest (staggers). I am tired, faint, for want of food; show mercy, as you hope for mercy, a little food I crave

IVAN.—Out of our sight, and the village, too, for that! We will drown thee in the lake, close by!

HULDA.—Is there no tender place in your hard heart for age, decrepitude, and want-some-food? Mother Earth, more kind than thou, will give me rest and drink.

IVAN.—What seek you here? Tell us! Waste no time, for every moment is an age to thee. Thy very presence chills the curdling blood in our blue veins; the yawning grave awaits thee, begone!

HULDA.—Have mercy! Upon my knees I ask one little boon. This quiet town should hold one noble heart; see these gray hairs, that should protect me from all harm!

IVAN.—Begone! I say, and so command! See you not yon lake's serene and placid breast? The summer air scarce leaves a wavelet to kiss the silent shore; thy body's breath will bubble from its mirrored depths.

WINFRED.—To the lake— (All start toward her.)

HULDA.—Stand back! Advance one pace, a Saxon mother's malediction will follow you through life, and melt thy hearts of stone in Hades' lurid flame! Stand back, I say!

IVAN.—We fear thee not, and waste the moments so

precious to thee now. Sieze her! Away, to the lake! (All rush upon her)

HERWARD.—(Springs between them.) Never! unless it be across this prostrate form! Back! or a cloven crown to him who stands not fast! Who commands?

IVAN.—Yonder hag comes from some grave-yard's dismal mould. Her evil eye will dire misfortune bring to us; but for thy timely aid, yon friendly sheet of water would have hidden her from sight.

HERWARD. - And ye are men, Saxon men! Where is thy manhood, that ye war on such as this? See ye not that aged head, those silvered locks? For very shame, thy blood should flush a coward's brow.

IVAN.—By Heavens, this is too much, (draws his sword) go to! thou art a Norman, and should be now in yonder robber's stronghold!

HERWARD.--(Knocks his sword point down.) Peace, Ivan; you would not care to cross a blade, or give a downward stroke, with Herward; put up your sword, and be a man. (To Hulda.) Good woman! Good mother! By heavens! she's dead! Some water, quick! (all rush and bring some) She breathes, moves, life returns! Leave us; I will answer with my sacred word, no harm will come to thee, or thine.

ALVAN.—Beware! the curse will rest with thee.

HERWARD.—So let it rest, away! (Shakes her) Rouse thee! A feeble pulse, and still more feeble frame.

HULDA.—(Awakes, stares around, looks wild) Where am I? Have they gone? Let me recall this fleeting sense; I must have fallen. Oh! Life, flow back along these sluggish veins, until my task is done! (Kneels at Herward's feet,) Thy hand, that I may kiss, and, kissing, thank thee for thy manly aid. A good deed brings its own reward, and doubly so, since age gives ready sanction. (Looks him in the face, throws his hand away, springs to her feet, strides to the other end of the stage.)

HERWARD.—Dethroned reason ; Gods pity, it is so.

HULDA.—My weary journey's done. Can death give back to life the form and features now so dear to me? This fevered joy will kill me! Softly beating heart, you will betray me, be patient and be brave, you've waited long.

HERWARD.—Another gaping crowd will be upon us; let us hence, at once, foot-sore and weary, you have traveled far, you will be welcome, come.

HULDA.—I can but bless thee. (*Exit both.*)

Scene changes. Interior Herward's home. Wife sewing, child on each side.

ATHELSTAIN (boy).—Mamma, why don't Papa come?

AZALINE.—My loving heart tells me he will soon be here, my child, Bright smiles make a royal welcome—silence, 'tis his manly step, I'd know it in a thousand. (Herward enters, all run to meet him; all run back.) Herward, who is this you bring?

HERWARD.—A friendless stranger. I saved her from an awful death Superstitious fools, and for an idle pastime. Blind ignorance is the veil that hides the truth from searching reason. A seat, good wife ; sit down and rest thee.

AZALINE. - For your sake, Herward. she will be a sacred guest, and for her sake, too. 'Tis pity moves my heart for this sad, friendless one; how she stares at me, devours me with her eyes.

HULDA.—Married! and she his wife! I dreamt not of this.

AZALINE.—Oh! Herward, I like not her looks, a thousand furies in each fiery glance ; deep sunken eyes, that burn like molten suns, then flash a world of vengeance and of hate ; save me from her, for she means to do me harm.

HERWARD.—Thou art a foolish child ; why should she harm one precious hair of your sweet head? I fear me much her reason's fled.

AZALINE.—Why bring her here, could she not find lodging in the inn?

HERWARD.---To-night my roof will shelter and protect; to-morrow where shall she go, I cannot send her hence!

HULDA.---To-morrow never is, but always will be; 'tis present, then 'tis past. I see, good Herward, thy wife likes not my presence. Show me to my couch; a little sleep will give me vigor, and give me strength.

HERWARD.---As yuo so will it. (Rings, servant enters.) Show her to her room; see to it, that she wants for naught. (*Exit Hulda, servant.*)

AZALINE.---I am glad she's gone, her very presence fills my soul with nameless dread; fear, like some ill omened bird is flitting 'round my heart How could she injure me? Poor, foolish heart, be still.

HERWARD.---Azaline, the pallor of thy cheek and brow sends sorrow to my heart. Why did I stay the hand of fate? A minute late, remorseless Death had claimed her for his own.

AZALINE.---Say not so; it was a noble deed.

HERWARD.---Cheer up; One would well think misfortune had already laid its heavy hand upon us.

AZALINE.---Her shadow, like some dismal pall, hangs heavy o'er my heart to kill the smiles that make the day so bright. Oh! save me from her, Herward!

HERWARD —And so I will, when danger sounds alarum; only shadows fright your timid heart.

AZALINE.—The shadows of impending doom. To the castle, Herward, there we will be safe. Our Saxon neighbors have little love for me; my Norman blood, they say. To the castle!

HERWARD.—A toss from those gray battlements would be my sure reward; they have as little use for Saxon blood, and like it best upon the ground. We are happy here, why make the change? The children, are they in bed?

AZALINE.—Some hours since.

HERWARD.—Without the good-night kiss? Come, we will gaze upon such innocence, whose daily cares are hushed, forgotten, when the sun goes down; draw inspiration with

each glance, and wish the world were half as good. (*Exit both.*)

Scene changes. Hulda's room, reposing on a couch, starts up and walks the floor.

HULDA.—The silence is profound; no living thing to look behind this mask. I am alone. (Listens.) I must see him, and begone. Oh! blessed night, I love thy solemn awe, and can commune with my sad heart, forgotten by this busy, bustling world of care! Night's darkening mantle brings peaceful sleep to drowsy lids. No sleep, no rest, until my work is done. Like some storm-tossed seaman, on a hopeless wreck, I cling to healthful life; I cannot, will not die. I can but gaze upon his sleeping face, and send my memory back along the eventful track of life---'tis a foot-fall! They must not see me thus. (Throws herself upon the couch, pretending slumber. Starts up again.) 'Tis gone. I must leave this place at once. His w-i-f-e! I hate, d-e-s-p-i-s-e! yon, puny thing! She is in my way. I'll see him. (Takes up a lamp.)

Scene changes. Herward asleep on a couch. Hulda enters, advances behind him.

HULDA.—God of our Saxon fathers, I dedicate this boy to thee! Let no feeling of remorse e'er turn his valiant heart, and sturdy blade, from deeds of greatness, and a Saxon crown! (Steals out.)

Scene in Herward's house next morning.

HERWARD.—(Rings a bell. Enter servant.) To our worthy guest, tell her we are waiting, breakfast will be cold!

SERVANT.—(Goes out. Returns excitedly.) Sir, she's gone; the bed scarce touched!

HERWARD.—Gone! Gone!

AZALINE.—Gone! Who has gone?

HERWARD.—As I am a Saxon, she has gone, and left no trace behind! Strange old woman, what goblin damned, or grave yard ghoul, has placed thee in this well secluded place?

AZALINE.—Would that she were hence, never to return.

A wide expanse of Neptune's realm would give us peace indeed. She has not gone, but lingers, and is not done with us. My soul is heavy with the bitter thought.

HERWARD.—I say, amen! Your fears run riot with your better sense

AZALINE.---I tell thee, Herward, the curse will surely fall upon us; I feel it here, and cannot shake the viper from me, so closely does it coil around my heart.

HERWARD.---Childish fears, only dismal phantoms, the cobwebs of the mind. Superstition and ignorance go hand in hand. Be bright and happy, as of yore.

AZALINE.---For your sake, Herward, I will try. (*Exit Azaline.*)

HERWARD.---She's gone Did I but tell my last night's dream (and such a dream) Azaline's mind would fill with fresh alarums. Ambition in the poise with wife and children's love. The fabled clouds of dreamland slowly fade away, and reason, with its sceptre, returns with light of day. I'll to the village, at once, some evil may befall our aged guest. (*Exit Herward.*)

Scene changes. A party from the Castle enter the woods adjacent Herward's house, a hawking party of Normans.

BERTRAM.—Peste! to our ill luck this day. The hawks are stupid, their quarry all to swift of wing, and quick to cover.

AUBREY.---Our whole day's sport will never shine resplendant from a cloth of gold. No tapestry to grace a baron's hall where wine and wassail are so free.

BERTRAM.---No dainty fingers will ever tire, or transfer this hunting scene, for, by my faith, 'twere quickly done.

AUBREY.---Who lives here? Some Saxon churl, I ween. A cold-blooded race, who feed on swine, and live by chase. (Knocks. Knocks again.) No one within?

AZALINE.---(Walks out.) Your reasons, gentlemen, for this untimely call, see you not the land is posted?

BERTRAM.—Pardon, fair lady, we are lost in this pathless

woods; and wandered here. Safe conduct to the castle, is all we ask.

AUBREY.---You seem to be a lady, or I am no judge, and Norman, too, which speaks well for thee.

BERTRAM.---My faltering tongue. with no offense, would ask a civil question.

AZALINE.---And will be promptly answered.

BERTRAM.---How comes so fair a Norman flower the inmate of yon Saxon bower, transplanted from a Southern clime?

AZALINE.---I'm married to a Saxon; would he were here, none like him in a thousand leagues.

BERTRAM.---Married! You do but jest. By our lady, you look scarce twenty.

AUBREY.---Say eighteen, a child, in years.

AZALINE.---Though with a Norman's heart. and with all her weakness, too. These Saxons have no flattering tongues; Blunt of speech, and little given to courtly manners.

BERTRAM.---'Tis part and parcel of a Norman's being, and like all else. was handed down, from sire to son.

AZALINE.---'Tis even so; but truth, the priceless jewel of a goodly life, lies not with a flattering tongue.

AUBREY.---By these gilded spurs, that cost me many a blow, you are too hard upon your race.

AZALINE.---A Saxon now, I've learned to tell the truth. Two faces and a smooth, quick tongue may well deceive.

BERTRAM.---Bravo! Well done, good woman, and good wife. No brighter star, no fairer flower, shines out above, or blooms below, and to be blunt needs cultivating. We will come again, and, by your leave,---

AZALINE.---Never! This is your last.

BERTRAM.---Say not so. fair lady. If we have angered you, a thousand pities it is so. If 'tis death to love thee, then welcome, death, for I am struck; the arrow rankles deep

AZALINE.---Away! I'll hear no more. You compromise my wifely love, that burns so sacred on yon household altar.

BERTRAM.---By heavens, she is superb! A waste of beauty is a shameful sin, and on a Saxon boor!

AZALINE.---Oh! Herward! would that you were here! Begone! An insult, and no one to protect.

AUBREY.---Come, Bertram, we must be gone; we will have the whole pack of Saxon dogs upon us, and some may have sharp teeth.

BERTRAM.---We will come again; say you will meet me here, once more! I madly love thee; absence will be misery to me. 'Till then, farewell! (*Exit both.*)

AZALINE.---What ill-timed fate—Why did they come—and at this very time, when yon old hag is here to do me harm. I stand upon the whirlpool's giddy edge; my poor, poor head already spins; I cannot see before me, all is dark. I can but feel that I am doomed. I will be brave and true; one false step would send me in the vortex. Circumspection and my Herward's love will save me. (*Exit.*)

Scene changes to the village street once more.

IVAN.---Glorious news! Good neighbors, from the Northern border! This seeming calm will soon be broken These quiet days, that come and go, will be remembered long.

WINFRED.---How learned you this?

IVAN.---A secret I dare not tell; enough to say 'tis true.

WINFRED.---Dare not tell?

IVAN.---Dare not; yes, dare not, the selfsame words I used.

ALVAN.---What of our evil-eyed crone of yesterday, why should she wander to this little place? Times are so unsettled, suspicion hovers over all.

IVAN.---Another secret confided to my keeping. Woe to us, had we thrown her in the lake.

ALVAN.—You speak in riddles. For once, be plain.

IVAN.—I can say no more Her mission is a goodly one for us, and should she come this way, we must, upon our very knees, confess that we were wrong, and humbly ask forgiveness.

(*Enter Hulda, talking to herself and muttering. Ivan advances, Hulda halts---looks up.*)

HULDA.—Well, you stop my footsteps? Out of my path! I would move on!

IVAN.—How can we rid us of the just reproach? See, good mother! on our knees we ask thy pardon for the great and heartless wrong.

HULDA.—Shades of the dead! How can this be? Yesterday, like famished wolves, ye thirsted for my blood. Today, like fawning dogs, ye lick my feet. Did I not tell thee I was Saxon, and hated Normans? Out upon thee, for a brazen set of knaves!

IVAN.—All men do err, We knew thee not.

HULDA.—And do ye know me now? (aside,) Who has betrayed me? My nervous hand would reach a dagger's hilt!

IVAN.—Why gave you not the sign?

HULDA.—(Starts.) The sign, said yon? You do but dream! Whereof do you speak?

IVAN.—We speak of that we know. (All kneel and draw their swords.) We give thee aid in time of need; our lives and swords are thine, and to command; our hearts are loyal to our country and our race!

HULDA.—'Tis well. Such words are music to the listening Gods; they fill my ears until my soul's entranced. You know not what the service is; 'twill try thy manhood and thy courage, too.

IVAN.—Accept and be content! Off with Norman William's yoke!

HULDA.—Up, then, ye are my children!

HERWARD.—(Enters hurriedly, stops--steps back,) Can my good eyes deceive me, or do I dream? The very men who would have tossed her in the lake, now kneel and ask forgiveness for the deed

HULDA.—Welcome, boy; my thoughts, and, better still, my wish to see thee, have met with quick response.

HERWARD.—With the dawn of day we missed thee from our roof, and with all haste repaired me to the village, fearing harm to thee, God be praised, thou livest, and art well.

HULDA.—Thy Norman wife, good Herward, fears some evil will befall her, and from myself; so thou seest I am here.

HERWARD.—And right well served by these good people, who took thee for the evil one. They would have burned, or torn thee limb from limb. 'Tis past belief, I found them at thy very feet.

HULDA.—The idol of to-day, may be the foot-ball of to-morrow I know as little as thyself. The tides, they ebb and flow; we will ride the topmost wave, mould stern destiny by an iron will.

HERWARD.—Thou hast some charm about thee, some amulet distilled from moon-beam's rays, or dug from caverened rock; how else explain the scene?

HULDA.—By my very life, and hope of immortality, I can tell thee naught.

HERWARD.—Come, return once more, and I will show thee how the Saxon and the Norman blood commingling, can live and love in peace.

HULDA.—Never! Thou art no Saxon true. Long years have left their trace upon this wrinkled brow; my heart is young, and throbs with vigor, it is the creature of my will, to send the quickening blood to every recess of my frame, that I may live to curse them! Do you hear me? That I may curse! and kill!

HERWARD.—Kind heaven forgive her, she is mad.

HULDA.—Mad? Why should I not be mad? For years I've nursed my wrath; I've wandered through this land, that should be ours. My hovel, and the dying embers, have warmed the blood that flows so slowly through these veins. It is my will to live, and live I will! till vengeance and my dagger drink deep of Norman blood.

HERWARD.—Come, good mother, thy dotage clouds thy intellect. The world's as fair, the days as bright, the flowers

as rare, although these Normans rule with lance in rest and ready for a charge.

HULDA.—And wilt thou be their leader, then, the foremost in the fight? Go to thy Norman wife, for, by my nurtured hate, thou art no Saxon now.

HERWARD.—Why drench the land with blood, or, would you hear their hated battle cry, as they scatter Saxon sheep, and only to be butchered, that we may doubly fasten the yoke upon our necks?

HULDA.—Like some hissing viper, roused from peaceful sleep, I'd send my poisoned fangs deep into their quivering flesh, and, did they crush me with an iron heel, every drop of blood would send up from the ground, fully armed, and ready for the fray, legions of brave men!

HERWARD.—Thy hate has quickened life along thy veins, till with their very pressure they would burst, and send thy hate; together with thy soul, down deep in hell.

HULDA.—How can I rouse thy spirit, boy? By telling of brave deeds, ambition's hand, to engrave thy name upon the tablets of eternal fame? Reach out thine hand and grasp the prize, or another will rich harvest reap, thy very name go down to death, as some wild flower that blooms and dies unknown.

HERWARD.—Now, by the gods that ruled Olympia, thou art mad! Why listen to a foolish dream, and still more foolish tongue?

HULDA.—You will listen well, and heed the very counsel you despise. Love wraps thy soul with dulcet visionings, till thy brave heart is woman's toy, the plaything of an hour.

HERWARD.—So let it be; we'll speak no more of this. I catch no gleam of reason in your black and hell-born thoughts I do but stumble at thy meaning, and am content to pluck the flowers of gladness that grow along my daily way.

HULDA.—Thy dream of happiness will soon be o'er; rude waking for thee. Sorrow will kill thy spirit, and thy joy! dull, leaden night will fly apace to send the torture to thy soul.

HERWARD.—Ha-a-a! you fret me past endurance. I can stand no more. Farewell; 'tis useless to contend.

HULDA.—Stay, Herward; as thou sayst, I am old and crabbed. Forgive me, boy, I only bless thee.

HERWARD.—Come, we will be gone. You will be welcome to my roof.

HULDA.—Never! though my thanks are due; go, boy; We will meet again, I am not done with thee.

HERWARD.—We do not part in anger. (*Exit.*)

HULDA.—Yon Norman woman's love shall never turn me from a life-long dream of vengeance, and of hate. I am feeble, weak and poor, but ye will tremble at my very name; and with no roof to shelter me, this tired head would rest. Where shall it be? My couch is wide, and broad as earth, but I can sleep as well.

WINFRED.—You are with friends, forget not, and follow as I lead.

HULDA.—I doubly thank thee, since it was unsought. (*Exit both.*)

Scene in Herward's home.

AZALINE.—Why does he not come? My longing heart is all impatience; my listening ears can catch no hurried step.

ATHELSTAN.—Mamma, you look so sad; are you not happy now?

AZALINE.—My precious boy, (throws her arms around him.) your glorious eyes are quick to see the shadows on my brow. There is heaviness here, your childish heart will never understand. All may yet be well.

ATHELSTAN.—Was it because you met those men, or that old witch? Nurse says she flew up on a broom-stick.

AZALINE.—Hush, my boy, you know not what you say. When all desert me, will you not love me still? Innocence may be dragged down by slandering tongues, yet be as pure as angels' happy dreams.

ATHELSTAN.—What do you say, Mamma

AZALINE.---Never forget, I am thy mother, boy; always love me.

GIRL.---Don't Papa love you, because he stays so long?

AZALINE.---How foolish, child, of course he loves me now (but will he always love me?). Come, say your prayers, and off to bed. (both kneel.)

HERWARD.---(Enters.) I say amen. Come, little ones, 'tis time you were in bed. (Kisses them. Nurse leads them out.)

AZALINE.---Welcome, Herward! No truant bird e'er found a softer nest. You are tired, sit down.

HERWARD.---I am not tired, my Azaline.

AZALINE.---Where have you been so long? The lagging shadows crept so slowly to the East.

HERWARD.---As thou well knowest, I hurried to the village, fearing harm would come to our aged guest. 'Tis past belief, before me stood this Hulda, at her feet the very men who would have snapped the thread of life, and sent her soul to Hades' gloom so quick she'd scarce have time to pray.

AZALINE.---Did I not tell thee so? Misfortune follows close upon her steps. Why did she ever curse us with her presence?

HERWARD,---Phantoms, my wife; how can she do us harm? Borrow nothing from the future, the present belongs, alone, to us; we make, or unmake our happiness.

AZALINE.---I can but feel our happy days on earth are numbered with the past. Yon withered hag will rob me of your love, and I will be forsaken and alone.

HERWARD.---Never! while life itsself shall last!

AZALINE.---Kind Heaven, I thank thee! You will love me always?

HERWARD.---Always! Cheer up, you look for dangers that will never come.

AZALINE.---Promise you will never let suspicion, like some evil fiend, find lodgement in your mind; believe no idle tales

that flow from slandering tongues, but trust me, Herward, Oh! trust your wife!

HERWARD.---Why should I not? You never gave me cause; I do not, cannot understand.

AZALINE.---You will, in time. Yon vengeful hag will use thee, and for what I cannot tell. How dark the future seems!

HERWARD.---She has some mission, I will confess, or madness claims her for its own; her rambling tongue is never ruled by reason's sway. A Norman life within her keeping were not worth a rush-light's flickering flame.

AZALINE.---I am Norman, and for this she hates me.

HERWARD.---You are my wife, and always will be. What care I for her? She will never make me love thee less! (*Curtain falls. End of first act.*)

Scene in the woods adjoining Herward's house. Enter Bertram and Aubrey cautiously.

BERTRAM.---Would that I had a score of Norman lances in reserve. By St. Dennis, and our lady, the danger is too great.

AUBREY.---Then why did you come on this hap hazzard love-sick chase, to see yon Saxon wife? She may not come without, and, for your trouble, perchance, can gaze with love-lorn eyes upon the roof and walls, and hear the swallows cry.

BERTRAM.---I will, I must see her!

AUBREY.---I'll preach thy funeral then.

BERTRAM.---The prize is well worth winning, e'en though my life should be the forfeit.

AUBREY.---Be not so rash, young, hot-spur. The bee-hive swarms with Saxon bees; sometimes they sting.

BERTRAM.---What can we do?

AUBREY.---Give up this idle dream, that racks your tender heart with pain. She madly loves this Saxon, as you could well see.

BERTRAM.---Your counsel I cannot, will not, heed! She shall be mine, though hell itsself should be my portion and my future fate!

AUBREY.---(Whistles.) I could well be sworn, thou lovest well this Norman wife.

BERTRAM.---Thou art a fool, Aubrey!

AUBREY.---I think so myself, in fact, 'tis pure and godly truth.

BERTRAM.---And wherefore?

AUBREY ---To leave the castle, yonder. for such an object, too. The portcullis will be down, the guards all posted; sleep in the woods all night, and shiver with the cold.

BERTRAM.---You are my friend in this, a comrade is a brother, tried and true.

AUBREY.---If truth e'er fell from human lips, 'tis now.

BERTRAM.---I, who have never felt the tender passion, love, till now, am frenzied with delay, and chide the slothful hours that keep me from her side; had I loved earlier, 'twould be different now.

AUBREY.---By our lady, I wish you had. (Sighs.)

BERTRAM.---You pity, then, the weaknees you call love, and sigh to think--

AUBREY.---Your'e such a fool. Brighter eyes and fairer faces greet thee every day. The world is full, thick as leaves upon the forest trees, or heavy dews that soon will gather, and wet us to the skin.

BERTRAM.---'Tis human; the very danger lends a thousand charms, tame possession cloys the appetite.

AUBREY.---Let us to the castle, ere it be too late.

BERTRAM.---Would that I could see her. Oh! God of love, give me but one silver arrow tipped with divinest poison, and thy bow, good Cupid, to send the arrow straight, that she may feel the pangs I now suffer.

AUBREY.---The sun is down, and darkness grows apace; we will be too late. Why waste the precious time in love-sick sighs? Bah! I am disgusted.

BERTRAM.---I hear a footstep! To the friendly shade of yonder tree!

HULDA.—(Enters, halts and looks around.) The sound of voices! Who could be in this lonely spot? I was mistaken, the stillness is profound; suits well, for I would be alone. How can I reach the goal? It seems so far removed in space, and yet a giant's strength is mine. The rush light flickers to a feeble blaze. Enough is left, and fanned by Hate's dire breath! It is renewed, and dying! Is renewed again! (Starts.) A broken twig! Someone is near! (Enters Bertram and Aubrey.)

AUBREY.---Silence, hag, we mean no harm to thee.

HULDA.—I fear thee not. Put up your swords. If I mistake not, ye are Normans, and from the castle.

BERTRAM.---What is that to thee?

HULDA.—Wouldst know ye are in danger her? One blast upon this horn and ye are subjects for Pluto's dark domain.

BERTRAM.---I have use for thee, and will pay well.

HULDA.—I would know the service first.

BERTRAM.---Can you place a note in yonder woman's hand?

HULDA.—That were easily done.

BERTRAM.---Without her husband's knowledge?

HULDA.—Your reason for so doing.

BERTRAM.---I would win the prize (by fair means or by foul) from Saxon Herward.

HULDA.—(Strides to one end of the stage.) Patience and a daring will may climb where eagles dare not soar. I'll seize upon the chance kind heaven has thrown upon my path. (Returns.) I will place the letter in her hands.

BERTRAM.---And bring an answer too.

HULDA.—I promise, 'tis enough.

BERTRAM.---Accept this gold, 'tis Norman coin and true.

HULDA.—(Strikes the purse from his hand.) Perish thy gold and the hand that offers such!

AUBREY.---Dotard! keep thy curses to thyself or by St. Denis we will carve thee bones and all.

BERTRAM.---Softly, Aubrey; you will ruin my only hope. Good woman, if you take not this gold, how can I reward thee?

HULDA.—I asked thee for no gold. Give me the letter. I will place it in her hands; or better still, I'll leave it in this stump. Come a few days hence, you'll find an answer.

BERTRAM.---How can I thank you, since 'tis all you will receive?

HULDA.—Not so, my love-sick boy. In serving thee I serve myself. If all goes not well a letter here will reach me.

AUBREY.---They are thy bitter foes? Love at second sight and childhood, when the heart is old the heart is young. Thou lovest this Saxon and you hate his wife. Speak. Is it not so?

HULDA.—You have truly said.

AUBREY.---As I am a Norman sinner, the thing we call love is strangest, when 'tis strange the winter's frost and killing snow would freeze the flowers of youthful gladness.

HULDA.—Peace, prattling fool, or I'll send this dagger to your cursed Norman heart.

AUBREY.—This is too much! I can scarce keep my fingers from thy throat. For Bertram's sake I spare thee. Thy tongue's as bitter as thy unrequited love.

BERTRAM.---The letter is here, as thou seest. I place it in this stump. Look you, and mark well, for I depend upon thee.

HULDA.—Three days hence we will meet again.

BERTRAM.---We will be prompt.

AUBREY.—Come, Bertram, to the castle, ere it be too late. I wish not to hear the challenge of our sentries, no awkward explanations to the old commander. He would be sworn we plotted treason with these Saxon swine. (*Exit both.*)

HULDA.—(Walks after them and shakes her fist) Fools! Idiots!! Dogs!!! Wolves!!!! Normans!!!!! How I hate you—puny whipsters love-sick fools—sigh, and sigh again, 'twill do thee little good. I'll keep him on the rack of eager expectation—fit instruments for my purpose. Would

that Herward's wife were safely caged in yonder pile of aged rock. The letter! (Goes and takes it out.) Precious missive! Breathings of love! How will I spread my snare for yon, sweet bird? Happy thought! (Takes out a spool of thread, unwinds, places the spool within the stump, other end toward the door.) This spool of fine spun flax will serve my purpose well. Herward will never see, but trust to woman's quick, unerring eye; and now to rest beneath this sheltering tree, those twinkling orbs that stud the star-lit depths of heaven will watch while Hulda sweetly sleeps.

(*Scene changes. Herward's home next morning. Herward and Azaline walk out.*)

HERWARD.—Bright as the morn, rosy as the dawn, aurora's smile to lighten up the crimson east. Tell me that yon still are happy; one such were worth a thousand frowns.

AZALINE.—These smiles are all for thee. Why should I not be happy? I will try for your sake, Herward. Banish every fear. (Starts.) What noise was that? I am so timid now.

HERWARD.—The twittering sparrows on the ivied walls, a fluttering feathered wing, 'twas nothing more.

AZALINE.—Do not leave me, Herward. I know you will think me foolish. Stay. Go not to the village. I fear for myself.

HERWARD.—Poor timorous hare! You start at every sound. Wild-eyed, startled deer, no hunter pursues thee. I will be back when yon ruler of the day has half his journey run.

AZALINE.—Why do you go?

HERWARD.—To hear the mutterings of the coming storm.

AZALINE.—What can you mean?

HERWARD.—Our Saxon blood needs cooling, a thrust from Norman lance or spear. We are too populous, Like rank weeds, we need some thinning.

AZALINE.—You will not leave me for this foolish dream? Let others seek a soldier's death.

HERWARD.—Only the clouds of war. The storm may pass us by. God grant it!

AZALINE.—What will become of me?.

HERWARD.—Do I not live? Be not downcast. All will yet be well. (*Exit.*)

AZALINE.—Why did he go? A prey to bitter thoughts and fancies, I do but dream the lonely hours away. My feverish blood makes timid nerves that start at every sound. How will it end? (Walks to the door, looks down.) What is this? Strange it should be here! (Lifts it.) Leads to yonder stump. Goes to the stump. Takes out the letter.) Fatal messenger, what evil day should bring you here? Thus will I end your short-lived power to do me harm. (Starts to tear it.) No I will save it; place in Herward's hands and tell him all. (*Exit Azaline.*)

(*Hulda comes from behind the tree.*)

HULDA.—I've staked my life upon the venture, and now yon sweet, sweet bird would cling more closely to her mate. She did not read the letter. Oh, woman's ruling passion, strong as death, you will not answer now. No reply! This love-sick, Norman fool will soon be here, and all my work for naught. I'll to the village, at once. To soothe the tender heart, to fan the steady blaze, success is written on the gilded domes of heaven. (*Exit.*)

(*Scene changes to the Village Inn. All seated at the tables.*)

IVAN —Here's to our Saxon cause that strengthens day by day, and gathers force at every turn to crush these hated Norman masters! Let Hastings be our cry! Success to all!

WINFRED.—This Norman William, for some royal ladies whim, embarked upon the sea, landed on our English coast and we were overrun.

ALVAN.—A mob! We have no leader! Unarmed! How can we hope to win?

WINFRED.—We have no money.

IVAN.—With leaders bold and true, stout arms, brave

hearts, surprise their outposts, seize their weapons and use them well.

ALVAN.—No easy task, good Ivan. Hard knocks and a soldier's life go hand in hand. With success and heavy slaughter some leader will mount to fame.

WINFRED.—These Normans keep close within four walls, exacting only tribute and their law

IVAN.—They have caused us little trouble here. Our neighbors of the North have banded, and only wait for some brave leader. They will watch our every move, meet us at every turn with walls of shining steel.

ALVAN.—How should they know? Who would betray us? Herward's wife is Norman. 'Twas only yesterday two Normans were seen with her.

IVAN.—How learned you this?

ALVAN.—It is enough, I know it to be true.

WINFRED.—Does Herward know?

ALVAN.—How should he? Was he not here?

IVAN.—Who would be the first to tell? Not I. For by our lady 'twould be risking much.

ALVAN.—He should be told. A friend to Saxons. He would not for his very life bring disaster to our cause

IVAN.—Here comes old Hulda, close companion of her thoughts. (All rise and silent stand. Hulda enters, talking to herself.)

HULDA.—How can I win this Herward? The swiftly passing days will soon round up the month. Time presses. I have done nothing yet. Would that Herward's wife would make one little step. Alas! for me, she is too true! To bring about a quarrel, 'tis impossible! He will never leave her for ambition's sake.

IVAN.—What trouble now? Absorbed in thought, you did not dream that listeners stood so near.

HULDA.—What did I say that Saxons should not hear? The same blood in our veins, the same hate in our hearts.

IVAN.—What was thy purpose coming to this inn?

HULDA.---True, I did forget. Give me pen, ink and paper at once.

IVAN.---'Tis here good mother.

HULDA.---'Tis well. What news from the border? Do our clans still gather and in force.

WINFRED.---You should be best informed.

HULDA.—I do not understand.

WINFRED.—Since you came from there yourself, have been here scarce one month--

HULDA.---Thy penetration is deserving of more confidence.

HERWARD.—Give me the latest from the border, unsettled times, will peace and plenty pass away?

HULDA.---And wherefore, boy? 'Tis naught to thee. Thy wars are over, thy courage fled; your vine-clad cottage and your Norman wife have tamed the lordly lion, and made of him a peaceful lamb, a spaniel to lick thy Norman master's feet.

HERWARD.--I have no master, and owe allegiance to none. My sword and fortune are my own; let those who thirst for Norman gore go where it runs the reddest.

HULDA.---Thou art no Saxon, to stand tamely by while others fight for thee.

HERWARD.—I see no use for war, dread harbinger of evil. Those waving fields of grain, so yellow in the golden sunlight, betoken peace and plenty; why change the sickle for the sword?

HULDA.---Those fields are billowed. like the sea; do they belong to us? We toil, are taxed, and have nothing in the end; for this you live!

HERWARD.—We have enough, and with it all, content, to cheer the thorny path of life. Down on you knees! pray! for a flickering torch will soon go out, and darkness, deep as death itsself will be thy lot!

HULDA.---Enough is left to show me yonder robber's den. When the last torch-light glimmer is swallowed in death, I will not be alone.

HERWARD.—I laugh to scorn your puny threat. A thousand, tried and true, could never scale those staunch old walls.

HULDA.---You will be their leader, too?

HERWARD.—Now do I pity thee, indeed. Let him who suffers wrong, redress the wrong; time should heal the wound of Hasting's bitter fight. Between these Dane's and Normans we have little peace.

HULDA.---The Saxon and the Norman blood will never mix, unless it be upon the ground, where Death his sceptre waves, clashing steel, with deepening gash, and gaping wound, run crimson gore.

HERWARD. And will they, for a fancied wrong, do this? Dethroned reason will be their leader, then, not sense.

HULDA.---Out upon thee, for a milk-sop! I have no pasience with thee.

HERWARD.---For this I saved thee from a plunge in yonder lake; a woman's tongue, behind the ramparts of her sex, can hurl abuse with liberal use.

HULDA.---Forgive me, Herward, 'tis for thy good, not mine. I would see thee in thy kingly robes, hast thou no wish to grasp a sceptre and a Saxon crown?

HERWARD.--You do but dream, good mother, crowns are not so plentiful that one can win them without force. The cares of State are burdens to be borne by patient asses, who take kindly to their loads.

HULDA.---Thou hast no pride. Exist, subsist, and die! (*Exit.*)

HERWARD,---She is a mystery to me. I do not understand; what part do I play---from whence this crown? There is but one, and that rests securely on Norman William's head, and there 'twill be time itsself shall die. Ivan, what news?

IVAN.- -Couriers reach us every day; nothing hasyet been done.

HERWARD.---And nothing should be done. Give up this mad and crazy dream, what profit will it bring? Defeat will rch upon thy banners, brave men will die for naught

WINFRED.---What is that to thee? Our blood, not thine will flow, our heads, not thine, will fall.

HERWARD.---Thrice I did forget, your pardon,

Scene changes to the woods near Herward's house.

BERTRAM.---My eager heart outstrips my wary prudence, for my imprudence, a foot of Saxon Herward's blade would stretch me lifeless on this tangled grass.

AUBREY.---Why run so great a risk? A prowling band of Saxons would make short work of us, and for a foolish dream.

BERTRAM.---Someone approaches---To shelter 'till the danger's past. (Step behind trees.)

HULDA.---'Tis time, so says the shadow of the sun. Oh! will they come?

BERTRAM.---Prompt to the very hour as thou seest.

HULDA.---So much for love's young dream. I have her letter here; she will be hard to win, though timid hearts can never hope to win so fair a prize.

BERTRAM.---How can I pay this heavy debt, since gold is naught to thee?

HULDA.---You can reward the service done.

BERTRAM.---Name it, 'tis thine already!

HULDA.---And wilt thou swear as much?

BERTRAM.---Most solemnly, by my knightly word.

HULDA.---Admission to the castle. I can read the secrets of the distant stars, gazing on thy open palm, the future stands before me.

AUBREY.---Thou art a cursed Saxon spy. I tell thee, no!

HULDA.---Perchance the ladies of the castle would be amused.

AUBREY.---Perchance the men at arms would drown thee in the moat. If thou wouldst live the few remaining years that belong alone to thee, go not to the castle.

HULDA.---The stars, they tell me no such tale.

BERTRAM.--(Reads the letter.) Alas! this letter would congeal the softly falling dew. Crumbs for my starving soul to feed upon. Hope eternal is the very life of man.

HULDA.—Your promise. I claim it by your knightly word. 'Tis little that I ask.

BERTRAM.—What do you ask?

HULDA.—Safe conduct to the castle and the watchword.

BERTRAM.—You know not what you ask. My head would surely fall.

HULDA.—The risk is mine.

BERTRAM.—What danger could she bring upon us? A harmless hag, her dotage and her tongue are all that's left. Think you not so, knightly Aubrey?

AUBREY.—I tell thee, Bertram, there is hate enough in one vindictive glance to fire the castle from turret to foundation stone.

BERTRAM.—We could shadow her every move. She could bring the letters to me straight and save thee from all this.

AUBREY.—There is danger in yon hag. As thou sayst 'twill save me from the trouble, and that is much, where danger lurks in every bush and flower.

BERTRAM.—I have promised and will surely keep the oath. (Takes off his ring.) This will keep thy person sacred from all harm. Enter as thou pleasest. But mark you well, you will be closely watched, and one little act of thine will bring upon thee instant death. Bring me an answer to this note at once.

HULDA.—Knightly Bertram, it shall be as you say. (*Exit Bertram and Aubrey.*) Fools, you place the castle at my mercy, and all for maddening love. 'Tis not the first time worlds and kingdoms have been lost and won, warriors, kings and princes all, own thy tender sway, and in their madness have thrown words away. So much for Hulda—to one who wills it—all things will surely come.

Scene changes to Herward's home. Enter Herward.

HERWARD.—Bad news, my wife The people are rising everywhere, and only wait a chance to slip this Norman's yoke that galls their tender necks.

AZALINE.—Say not so. Pray kind heaven that the blow be spared.

HERWARD.—Once these bloody dogs of war shall slip the noose, and at each other fly, who can tell where it will end? Peace, content and plenty, like timid birds, will speed them to a happier clime.

AZALINE.—You will not join them, Herward? For my sake, do not go? Who will care for Azaline?

HERWARD.—I cannot stay behind. My very pride would shudder at the thought. Besides, I'd be the target for any Norman lance.

AZALINE.—What will you do?

HERWARD.—Place thee in safety beyond the hostile lines, then join me to the Saxon ranks. I have no bitter feeling for these Normans.

AZALINE.—Why should you have? They never brought harm to thee or thine.

HERWARD.—I bear them no resentment, and see no cause for cruel war. I am content, and have no wish to change this thatched Saxon roof for tented fields or banners for these nut-brown hands.

AZALINE.—Herward, I have something of import to tell to thee. You will not be angry?

HERWARD.—Like the patient ass, I am all ears.

AZALINE.—'Tis nothing in itsself, but others have said

HERWARD.—Like the well drilled soldier, I am all attention.

AZALINE.—Not three days since some Normans from the castle came within our gate.

HERWARD.—There is nothing strange in that.

AZALINE.—One of them, Bertram, by name, gives much cause for uneasiness. He madly loves me, and would stop at nothing. They flattered with no stinted tongue.

HERWARD.—What did they say?

AZALINE.—They said I looked scarce twenty, handsome as some quaint old picture.

HERWARD.---They spoke the truth, Normans though they be, and have some taste. What else? Go on.

AZALINE.---Said I had thrown myself away upon a Saxon hound.

HERWARD ---Had I been here such insolence would not have gone unpunished.

AZALINE.---There is little in this all. In Hulda's hands 'twould seem more formidable. The human frame, like some well-strung instrument of music, has sundry strings, and jealousy is one of them. I thank me, the string did not respond to my more than eager touch.

HERWARD.---Not for my chance in heaven would I believe thee false.

AZALINE.---I have his letter with seal and signet yet unbroken. Thine eyes will be the first to read. (Feels for it in vain.) 'Tis gone! (Excitedly.) Where can it be? I placed it securely here.

HERWARD.---A letter! This looks not well. I would see it! and at once.

AZALINE.---Oh, Herward! Do not scowl upon me thus!

HERWARD.---I would see the letter! Would that I could cross this Bertram's path!

AZALINE.---I thank the blessed stars you were not here.

HERWARD.---To save thy Norman lover, or myself?

AZALINE ---Why should I care for yonder Norman from the castle? He is naught, or ever will be.

HERWARD.---You seemed well pleased. His flattering tongue has turned thy empty head and still more foolish heart.

AZALINE.---And should it not? I never hear such words from thee.

HERWARD.---You do not listen then. A tale oft' told is irksome to the listener.

AZALINE.---You are angry. I'll say no more. I never wronged thee by thought, word or deed.

HERWARD.---Forgive me, Azaline, some jealous pang unworthy of my manhood unseated reason for the while. 'Tis past.

AZALINE.---The thorny path of life spreads out before me. Trusting in thy love, I left my people to follow thee. Your Saxon friends have never loved, but look upon me with distrust.

HERWARD.---What care we for their ill mannered, churlish way? We are content to pass the more than happy hours within our humble home. The sun ne'er comes an hour too soon, or sets an hour too late.

AZALINE.---All is wrong since Hulda came amongst us. Would that my eyes could never rest upon her. Shun her as you value my devoted love. For my sake, be brave and true. Forget she ever lived to blight the flowers along life's sunny path. Banish her to other worlds than ours—to regions of despair. A black cloud in a cloudless sky, portending wreck, ruin and a storm.

HERWARD.---I will be brave. You would so say could you have seen us in the village street and inn, more merciless than the pelting storm, her stinging words they lashed my soul to fury, till I could have killed her where she stood; and all for thee, my little wife.

End of second act.

Scene at the Castle. Portculis, Sentinel on post walking back and forth.

SENTINEL.---Stand thou fast, old hag, or I will cleave thee in twain with this keen ax.

HULDA.---'Tis not so written in the book of fate, that I should die, and by thy puny hands.

SENTINEL.---What care I for your book of fate? Your business? Be brief! and get thee hence.

HULDA.---I would see knightly Bertram, and at once. I have my passport. (Takes out the ring and shows it.)

SENTINEL.---By our Lady and St. Dennis you stir not one foot until I call the Captain of the watch. Guard! Guard! Post No. 1! (Captain and guard march out.)

CAPTAIN.---Who have you here, good sentinel?

SENTINEL.—See for yourself—she stands before thee.

CAPTAIN.—Thine errand be quick.

HULDA.---I would have speech with Sir Betram at once—a message admits of no delay—see here is my passport. (Shows the ring.)

CAPTAIN.—'Tis a goodly one—about face and follow close. (Hulda enters, followed by the guard.)

Scene changes. A room within the castle. Lords and ladies all sitting around. Enter Page.

My Lord of Betram—there is an old woman without who craves audience with thee—

BERTRAM.—Admit her at once. (*Enter Hulda.*) Here is one who can read the aspect of the distant stars—an old astrologer, Hulda by name.

HULDA.---Iwould see you, all alone, this no place to tell thee of my mission.

BERTRAM.—Thou hast my letter then?

HULDA.—In good truth I have. 'Twill make thy heart thrice glad.

BERTRAM—Tell us of the future,—a god send to this goodly company---an idle brain, and still more idle life, do clog the wheels of time, that move so slowly till the sun is down.

AUBREY.—Who will be foremost—as thou sayest time is more plentiful than aught else. The very vines upon the castle walls, out-strip its leaden pace.

BERTRAM.—Lady Clare, if thou wouldst lift the veil that hides the future, with thy good pleasure, we would listen till our time has come.

HULDA.—(Bowing low.) I am ready, if it is thy wish? or does the ever-changing future seem too far for human ken?

LADY CLARE.—I thank thee, Knightly Bertram, and only wish that I could mold the future to my eager will.

BERTRAM.—Are you not happy here?

LADY CLARE.—Why should I be? Immured within these gray old walls—a veritable prisoner—a gilded cage 'tis true, and yet I sigh for home and friends beyond the sea.

BERTRAM.--'Tis true indeed. Though Norman William holds this goodly land by force of arms, we dare not move a league from this Saxon stronghold, without a score of men at arms.

LADY CLARE.—How different in dear old Normandy. These people seem so savage, rude barbarians—scowl upon us, and with lowering brow, they curse--though they dare not kill. When will we return?

BERTRAM.--Who can tell? Nevermore will our good eyes behold the scenes of happy, gladsome childhood. To die in harness, 'tis a soldier's fate—we will cross the sea no more.

AUBREY.—Why recall such memories? 'Tis sadness to the heart, and does us little good.

LADY CLARE.—Here is my hand, good woman.

HULD .---(Takes it, scans it) 'Tis written in the book of fate, and stands before me as some twice told tale. Hast thou the courage to gaze before thee?

LADY CLARE.—I have, keep nothing back.

HULDA.--The line of life is short, and crossed by other lines--crooked as some withered branch. Your life has not been a happy one, from childhood to this hour. There is murder and a fortune lost. Thy proud heart keeps the secret well.

LADY CLARE.—I'll hear no more of this. I asked not for the past--the future I would see.

HULDA.—Patience, Lady Clare—through the past and present leads the future. I must follow close these lines, and will tell thee all. The future looks more bright, you will see your distant home again before many moons, their silvery shadows cast. All will be changed, strangers will gaze, and know thee not—then you will sigh for these same walls that shelter now.

LADY CLARE —Will I return?

HULDA.—You will return to England, but to this place never more. These halls that echoe with such heavy Norman footsteps, and the Sentries' measured tread, the wine wassail

and the song, the rippling laughter that floats upon the summer air, will all be hushed.

LADY CLARE.---Out upon thee for a croaking raven, hast thou no good in store for us.

HULDA.—A pile of ruins and gray battered walls, generations yet unborn, will gaze upon a shapeless mass and wonder at the legend, so filled with bloody deeds.

BERTRAM---Thou camest from the blackest night that ever palled this earth. Something more cheerful. You cast a gloom on all.

HULDA.—I but speak the truth eternal as the stars that never set.

BERTRAM.---Tell me my fortune, perchance 'twill be a better one.

HULDA.—Stretch forth thine hand, and open wide the palm. (Takes his hand.) Thy line of life is broad, but short. You have lived a merry life, and sudden as some lightning stroke, the thread of life be sundered by the sword's keen edge---you will meet your master in the cruel art of war, you well have earned your spurs, and proudly wear them.

BERTRAM.---How else should a soldier die? You are as silent as the grave --what of my present.

HULDA.—That belongs alone to thee, and thy good sword.

BERTRAM.---What mean you?

HULDA.---Through thy knightly prowess---the prize a Saxon roof does hide, is truly thine.

BERTRAM.---As well jabber in an unknown tongue. Be brief and above all be plain.

HULDA.---You will have to bring her to the castle. Once here, your task will be an easy one---at home she fears to take the step, surrounded as she is.

BERTRAM.---To hear is to obey---give me the letter.

AUBREY.---You have never forecast my future. I await my turn.

HULDA.---All is bleared and indistinct. No light breaks upon me. Another time, Sir Aubrey.

BERTRAM.--Give me the letter. (Hulda hands to him.) I will see thee outside and have an answer ready. (*Exit Hulda.*)

AUBREY --We are solemn as some penitents, who neared the valley of eternal death where to smile, would be everlasting sin. (Good Page bring us more wine.) 'Twill take a flagon to dispell the gloom. yon haggard witch has spread around.

BERTRAM.--Then wine it is,---drink often and drink deep. It smoothes the path of life, plucks out the thorns, leaves only roses to exhale perfume.

LADY CLARE.—Well said---life is short at best. Why waste the golden moments in useless repining --the sands of life must e'en run out. Father Time is ready for the ripened grain

BERTRAM.---My suit prospers not well. These letters are too cold. I must see her face to face. I cannot live without her, she shall be mine, as Hulda says, once in this stronghold she would soon forget this Saxon Herward.

AUBREY.—Dreaming when such wine as this is scarcely touched. Yon gray old hag has thrown a spell on all. 'Twill ease the throbbing heart-aches, that rack your love-sick soul.

BERTRAM.---And bring our worthy commander upon us, as stern and unrelenting as cruel fate, a very hermit of the rock, a relict of the past, whose life would make a thrilling story of brave deeds.

AUBREY.—He suits King William well, and was a war-like Dane. How many castles he has besieged and taken! How much booty with it all---a bitter foe to Saxons, he would rather kill than eat.

BERTRAM.---The grand rounds as I am a Norman Knight Come, Aubrey, to our posts. (*Exit all.*)

Scene changes. A camp within the woods, Saxons all lying around. Enter Hulda softly.

HULDA.—Sleep well, good Saxon men; for to thy arms and blades of steel, I look for bloody days, and still more

valiant deeds. Would that Herward would lead our faithful allies. His name would be a tower of strength, worth a legion of brave men. I must win him to our cause, but how?

Soldiers all start up and grasp their arms.

HULDA.—Peace, 'tis only I. No sentinel on post—ye fear no danger then.

IVAN.—For very truth's sake. we did over-sleep ourselves. How fared thy mission, well, I hope.

HULDA.—More than well, for like our Minstrel King in Danish Guthrums camp, I used my eyes. I gained access to the castle with all ease. Seest thou this ring 'twill give the castle up to flames and butchery.

WINFRED.—When do the guards change watch?

HULDA.—I did not learn, they followed close upon my steps, and did distrust me much.

ALVAN —How came you by that Norman ring?

HULDA.--Bertram, by chance met Herward's wife, bereft of reason he madly loves. He gave me this that I might be the bearer of his tender missives.

IVAN.--Thou sayest Herward's wife---his very joy, and pride of life,---sends letters to this Norman bastard?

HULDA.---I said not so. She loves our Herward all too true---no weak spot in her polished steel clad suit. I have a scribe who writes them.

WINFRED.---Well done, good Saxon mother.

HULDA.---Precious ring, I love thee with a loyal heart---fit instrument of my patient vengeance. Yon hoary headed commander sleeps in peace. Dream on, your time will come at last.

ALVAN.---Will Herward lead us when the time has come for action. or will he for his Norman wife, give up your well laid plans?

HULDA.---I have two strings upon my broken harp that yet respond to my more than magic touch. One arrow left in hates almost empty quiver, send it from the bow straight to

his love-sick heart-- till poisoned past all *leachery*. He'll slay and kill the thing he loves so madly now.

IVAN.—I stumble at thy meaning.

HULDA.—Fire his very soul with jealous rage. Yon Norman fool will be the poisoned arrow, I will be the bow, One of two things will surely come to pass. They will use their tongues. She is too proud to bend, and she will leave his roof to go to yonder castle, or this Norman will seize her by force of arms. Once in the castle, Herward will be your leader then, for madness follows on the heels of grim despair. Once arouse him and yon castle will be a bubble in the wind. The ball once moved, where will it stop?

IVAN.---How know you she will fall an easy prey to cunning and deceit?

HULDA.---The first act in the play is past. I did probe deep and well. Herward showed a weak spot---she was proud, too proud to own a seeming wrong.

WINFRED.---Thou hast no feeling of remorse to rend in twain two loving hearts that madly worship and are one.

HULDA.---I have a higher claim than she to this love sick boy.

IVAN.---What claim can you have?

HULDA.--(Aside.) My foolish tongue outstrips my better reason. (Turns.) The claim his country has upon him.

ALVAN---Against this claim, his wife and children's love. You cannot hope to win him to our cause.

IVAN.---You will run a great risk in this, and for your pains perchance may have his iron grip upon thy thy throat. One can no more live without breathing, than one can enter heaven without dying.

HULDA.---His iron grip would palsy, and grow weak before my conquering will. Fear not, for Hulda will never die, until my race is run, the goal is reached.

WINFRED.---Wondrous woman, thou art not human.

HULDA.---Ye know not well the motive that stays the hand of time--a monument of the past. I have outlived my years.

Mind is master over will, our lives belong alone to us, and long or short as we so decree.

IVAN.---Long live our Saxon leader, and our cause.

HULDA.---To your beds once more. I will guard your sleeping camp. (All lie down, Hulda sits by the fire.) How still the midnight air. The noisy hum of insects in the dew wet grass. The silence is profound, the shadows of these stately oaks would be phantoms to a timid soul. I have courted sleep as some coy lass, but she is chary of her smiles and favors too. Each glowing ember of this smouldering fire will throw some light upon my future path that widens as it goes.

Scene changes to the woods adjoining Herward's home. Enter Azaline.

AZALINE.---How calm and bright the day! My very soul drinks in the quiet of this little world of happiness. Why should I borrow sad misgivings that may never come. I am well rid of this Norman and his friend, fool, he can never rob me of my Herward's love.

BERTRAM.---Never! 'Tis a solemn word, fair lady, and means eternity itself, not so with thee I pray you recall such hasty words, and to one who loves thee better than his life, 'tis cruel death.

AZALINE.---(Starts.) I will not, cannot listen to such words from thee. Begone, thy presence angers me, and brings unhappiness to all.

BERTRAM.---Not till you have some pity for my unrequited love. Who shall blame for that I cannot help. Thy fatal beauty will yet be my death.

AZALINE.---Ah! well thou knowest I can never love thee. Your words insult my wifely heart, and were he here nothing more certain than thy death. Go!! go!! if you value life.

BERTRAM.---Not until you give me what I ask.

AZALINE.---Then I will go within--you shall not use such words as these. To evil eyes all things are evil, and you compromise my very honor that jewels in a kingly crown could never buy. Begone! begone!! I hate! I hate you

BERTRAM.---I will stay till the coming of thy Herward--try his prowess, one will fall, the other wins the prize.

AZALINE.---And you will fall.

BERTRAM.---Death will ease my pain. I cannot live and thou another's.

AZALINE.---You will never see the sun go down.

BERTRAM.---My sword is stout and true. He wins who strikes the truest blow.

AZALINE.---What do you ask?

BERTRAM ---That I may kiss thy finger-tips, crumbs to the starving dog.

AZALINE.---And wilt thou go?

BERTRAM.---By my knightly love, I swear.

AZALINE.---Then begone (Extends her hand. Bertram kisses it.) (*Exit Bertram.*) (Hulda steps from behind a tree.)

HULDA.---Well done for Herward's wife, his suit progresses well, and soon you will be an inmate of yon castle. If I believe my eyes, but a moment since he kissed thy hand. The dark-eyed daughters of the South, love with an ardent love, not so with us. Who can blame thee, child, not I. This Norman suits thee better than thy Herward.

AZALINE.---Alas! I am undone. Your coils are ever tightening around me. All are against me, where can I turn for help? Woman, what have I done to thee that you should hate me so. See on my knees, (kneels) I beg for mercy.

HULDA.---Silly fool to ask for mercy from Hulda too, you do but jest.

AZALINE.---(Springs up.) 'Tis true, I but ask mercy of a stone. I, who am innocent of any wrong, am hounded by your cruel and relentless hate.

HULDA.---Why repine? You are a Norman, and belong not to us.

AZALINE.---And you will pour in Herward's ear the venon of thy viper's tongue.

HULDA.---The game is mine, and well within my grasp. Think ye, foolish child, I'll loose a single chance?

AZALINE.—I am innocent. Tell him truly what you have seen, such is not thy purpose.

HULDA.—I can crush thee as some puny worm. I have no mercy in my heart, These eyes long since were dry.

AZALINE.—Why do you hate me?

HULNA.—You are Herward's wife, and in my way. Hulda stops at nothing.

AZALINE.—Why do you live, unseemly ill-begotten hag? You should be mouldering now, we understand eachother. Innocence all armed in proof against a foul and lying tongue, kind heaven will smile upon me to defeat your hell born hate. Out of my sight forever.

HULDA.—I can but laugh at thy weak effort. You will see me till those castle walls, hide thee securely from my sight. In the calm dead of night, when happy dreams did wreathe a smile upon thy childish face, I could have slain thee, but you were useful to me and I spared thee.

AZALINE. Begone for in my torture, I will surely kill. Do your worst, but let me never see thee again, If Herward's heart is turned by thy false tales, I am too proud to bend or ask forgiveness for a seeming wrong. (Walks up to her.) Now go, if you would live.

HULDA.—Not by thy childish hand will Hulda ever fall. Thou canst not antedate my doom till fate condemns me to the silent tomb. (*Exit.*)

AZALINE.—Why am I so powerless—so weak? I can but weep, and weeping fall an easy prey to grim despair. Oh, breaking heart, not one little ray of hope will come to cheer me through it all! (Weeps.)

HERWARD.—Weeping, Azaline? What can it mean? Nay! Nay! This will never do! Tell me who has caused those bitter tears?

AZALINE.—The hand of fate is tracing now my future on the wall. You, too, will be against me, for of life 'tis truly said: 'When one is tottering and about to fall, few there be to stay the progress of the wreck.'

HERWARD.—What wreck? I see no wreck.

AZALINE.---Why are you so blinded? Oh, Herward! I have staked my all upon your generous and impulsive heart! Will it stand the test?

HERWARD —Truly I am blind. Be plain of speech. I would not cause thee one regret for England and its crown.

AZALINE.—Men climb with labor and research where women go with ease. When first my eyes beheld yon ugly hag intuition, the jewel of a woman's diadem, told me she would bring unhappy discord to our little home.

HERWARD—You do but torture; 'tis unkind.

AZALINE.---You will be told that I am false to every wifely vow. That Bertram of the castle madly loves me. All look upon me with distrust. I look to you for love and shelter. Will you always love me?

HERWARD.—You gave him no encouragement?

AZALINE.--On thy Druid's oath I swear.

HERWARD.—Enough! Though legions of bright angels from their home on high should tell me you were false, I would not so believe.

AZALINE.---See to it then. Promise you will never see yon witch again.

HERWARD.—I'd sooner see the devil, hide, hoof and horns, such stormy scenes and such a tongue.

AZALINE.--Brave and noble Herward, I bless thee with my loving, truthful heart, though all seems dark to me. And with this foul suspicion, like some venomed snake with ready poisoned fangs, is ever ready to strike and kill.

HERWARD.—Then strike you back, for armed with innocence how can she do you harm? No weak spot in thine armor and rivets all in place, the cruel shafts of malice will glance and shiver at your feet.

AZALINE.—Come, Herward, for the present we will pluck the roses, and when the leaves do fall then comes the hidden thorn. (Both go within.)

Scene changes. Camp in the woods, soldiers all asleep, Hulda by the fire rises.

HULDA.—The day is mine. The future stands before me, and seems so bright, 'tis glaring io these weak old eyes step by step along its tortuous way. I followed with many a faint and weary step the becning hand of vengeance and of hate. I've breathed its very air. sweet morsels for a hungry, wolfish soul! Exultant joy is mine! I hear a footstep, it should be him.

HERWARD.—(Enters.) This is a strangely lonesome place. Soldiers! I am betrayed! (Draws his sword.) If 'tis my life they seek, it will be dearly bought, for by my Saxon blood this single arm shall carve a way to freedom and my wife.

HULDA.—Put up thy sword, 'tis sleeping danger that besets thee. This is a Saxon camp.

HERWARD.—Can I believe my eyes—'tis Ivan, Winfred Alvan, and scores of trusty men. The last ray of hope has fled—and has it come to this? What do they here? There is blood and slaughter in the air. Well, your messenger has brought me here.

HULDA. –You will lead those men before another moon climbs near the sun. Yon castle will ours.

HERWARD.—Now by my Druid's oath I know that madness kills thy very reason, to take so strong a place, and with this sleeping handful.

HULDA.—When stilly midnight lulls to sweet repose the Norman watch with sleepy yawns their steady rounds do go, like crouching tigers scenting helpless prey, we will spring upon them. The dying moans upon the quiet air is all the sound you'll hear, not louder than that cricket's chirp.

HERWARD.—You have not men enough for this. 'Tis madness and sure death.

HULDA.—Within the present week five detachments will be here, well armed and ready for the fray, barbarian hoards, who will fight for booty and the spoils of war.

HERWARD.—This will roll the flames of cruel war upon our fields of grain. Honest labor like some injured god will follow peace and plenty where well kept lands and happy homes do smile.

HULDA.—Is thy home so happy then, and with this Norman wife?

HERWARD.—Thou knowest well 'tis true. Thine eyes have seen as much.

HULDA.—Deceit is woman's second self. 'Tis part and parcel of her very life. To trusting fools she tells the oft told tale and vows undying love.

HERWARD.—In good truth I grope in darkness. The priceless love of woman is to rough man a paradise on earth. A thousand glittering gems that stud a kingly crown would weigh as naught beside it

HULDA.—Foolish boy, how little do you read the human heart! Thy penetration would ill become a teething babe. Trust on, this wealth of love will vanish like a fleeting dream.

HERWARD.--Be bold of speech. I like not such uncertain meanings.

HULDA.—Wouldst thou know the truth?

HRRWARD.--I am not fond of lies.

HULDA --I would tell thee of a vine-clad Saxon bower all nestled close beside a sheltering hill. The twittering sparrows have lined the walls with nests, a dark-eyed daughter of a Southern race, who lived beyond the sea, is life and sunshine to them all.

HERWARD.—I care not to listen.

HULDA.—One of her race did look upon this happy, peaceful home. The wife and mother, faithless to each altar vow, betrayed this husband's honor—'twas on every tongue. None so blind as they who will not see.

HERWARD.--For this I came. I care not to hear such nursery tales, they are for children and not men.

HULDA.—What clouds thy mind, as blind as any bat that winks and blinks to shun the noonday sun.

HERWARD.---Once for all, what is thy object? I must return. The way is long.

HULDA.--Wilt thou be the leader of this sleeping band of Saxons, and storm yon Norman stronghold? They will follow thee to Hades and its dark domain.

HERWARD.—And for what? They of the castle have never done me any wrong Why should I war on them? I tell thee. no!

HULDA.—You have a woman's heart. Yon castle holds thy wife's hot-blood Norman lover. Fool, thy wife is false to thee! Mine eyes have seen as much, and by my Saxon oath 'tis true.

HERWARD.—Seer! Viper! I did warm thee by my household fire, and now you turn and sting. A thousand furies seize upon thee to destroy! I will choke thee till thy tongue is black as hateful night, and rid the earth of one who lives to curse! (Advances to choke her.)

HULDA.—Then palsied be thy hand! I am thy mother, boy! (Herward staggers.)

HERWARD.—The proof alone will save thee!

HULDA.—'Tis here. (Holds it up.)

HERWARD.—(Kneels at her feet.) Can you forgive me? Forgive me!

Scene in Herward's home. Enter Azaline.

AZALINE. Oh! doubly cruel fate, relentless as grim visaged death. Innocent, I stand condemned, pure asheaven itself, my name on every slandering tongue. Where can I go? What can I do? Friendless and alone, Herward has changed. Oh, heaven born pride, sustain my sinking soul.

HERWARD.—Azaline, you here?

AZALINE.—In good truth, where else should I be.

HERWARD.—Your presence is irksome, I would be alone.

AZALINE.—You are angry and know not what you say.

HERWARD.—Read that letter, and that, and that. (Hands her three letters.)

AZALINE.—Shades of the just who roam elysian fields,--where did you get them? (Walks to and fro, excitedly.) I

had them all, who could have stolen them?--'twas Hulda. One sorrow more for my already broken heart. I see yon viper's slimy trail, the very flowers do droop and die.

HERWARD.—What have you now to say? Is the proof sufficient, or shall I bring a score of yonder villagemen?

AZALINE.—If you believe me guilty, I am condemned already.

HERWARD.—Oh, king of terrors, that men call death--welcome, a thousand times welcome. To live 'tis hell and torture, to die is everlasting rest.

AZALINE.—Herward! Herward!! Do not spurn me from you. I am innocent--I am innocent.

HERWARD.—Out of my sight, vilest of all created things, the very blush of shame should mantle neck and brow, my very name, a byword and reproach. Oh, I could kill thee, base ignoble one

AZALINE.—The curse has fallen, and with such force, it grinds to powder our once happy love, that every wind that blows may scatter, and every atom tell its tale of ever fickle love.

HERWARD.—Mine was no fickle love, to change with every wind. God knows I loved thee once. My household altar, to thee I prayed, worshiped at thy shrine, all is over.

AZALINE.—I am too proud to beg for swift fleeting love like thine. Alone I stand a marbled mould of human woe, too pure for hands like thine to touch, cold as the hand of death, I have no love for thee.

HERWARD.—You met this Norman Bertram then?

AZALINE.—I did, but 'twas not of my seeking.

HERWARD.—And he did kiss thine hands?

AZALINE.—True again. But 'twas to rid me of his presence.

HERWARD.—He did write those letters then?

AZALINE.--True as Truth can be.

HERWARD.--And thou dost flaunt thine ensign of disgrace beneath my very eyes. (Walks to and fro.) These hands have strength to throttle thy weak breath of life.

AZALINE.--Add murder to thy manly soul, 'twill fitly end this cruel scene, and when this little bark of life shall sail on unknown seas, my body food for worms, repentance will then come too late. Remorse will sting thy guilty soul. No rest for thee—for me eternal sleep.

HERWARD.--I will kill myself, not thee.

AZALINE.—Go!! seek Hulda. She will tell thee what thy path shall be, she has robbed me of your love, blighted every hope of future happiness, brought unhappy strife in our dear home, and on the ashes of our love would build a Saxon throne.

HERWARD.--Speak no more of her, 'tis sacrilege on such lips as thine.

AZALINE.--Go to her and say, That you belong to her, bought with a cruel price. Her witchcraft like some subtle force, will draw thee down from glory to the grave. Thou art the armor to receive the blows, that well should rain upon her mi-shapen self. Her dwarfed soul is narrow, crooked and is filled with hate for one who never did her wrong.

HERWARD.--Silence, she is my mother.

AZALINE.---Ah!!! a light breaks in upon my clouded mind. Why were these eyes so dull to see no further than the nearest ee

HERWARD.--Begone!! and leave me with my bitter thoughts. They will keep me company now. (*Slow Music.*)

AZALINE.---I forgive you, Herward, for this doubly damned deed. I have naught but love for thee and well could kiss the hand that smites me to the earth. Farewell. When I am gone you will feed my little birds---it will be strange to them at first---they too will soon forget me. (Weeps.) Tell our children of their mother, speak of me as one who's dead, and tell them, as they kneel in prayer, that I am always near to them. Farewell. Azaline is innocent,---is innocent. (Staggers out.)

HERWARD.---And I believe she is. I'll follow lest some harm may come to her. (Starts after her. Meets Hulda.)

HULDA.---Where is thy pride? Stay, you play the fool. Forget her, let us to the camp, come my son, the path of glory is before thee and shines with dazzling light.

HERWARD.-- Forward, I follow thee. (*Exit both.*)

Scene changes. Azaline comes back. Another room. Children asleep in bed. (*Slow music.*)

AZALINE.---And must I leave these happy scenes, and for no sin. I have little in this world, this broach was his first gift, it is not mine. I'll place it here, and with this ring he swore to love, protect, defend, till life itself had fled. I will release the solemn promise made. My children, (weeps) how can I say farewell. (Kisses them over and over.) I would not pain your little hearts with this sad parting (kisses and cries.) You will have no mother's tender and watchful care. I leave this letter with the broach, and ring, that he may know I loved him still. I must tear my self from these, or my proud heart will never go. (Dashes out. Is stopped by Bertram.)

BERTRAM.---Whereaway, my lady fair---weeping. What does it mean? A thousand Saxon lives for every tear.

AZALINE.—Out of my path! You have done me wrong enough already!

BERTRAM.—Take not life's ills so hard. There is still joy for thee.

AZALINE.—Would that I could strike thee dead. I hate you as no Saxon ever did!

BERTRAM.—'Tis time you were amongst your own, or by my golden spurs you'd be the vilest Saxon of them all.

AZALINE.—Leave my presence at once—I'll call my—my—

BERTRAM.—He is even now at yonder village inn, farther than four arrows' flight.

AZALINE.—Spare me! I can never love thee! You would not want a heartless bride? And for thy knightly courage you seize poor, helpless woman—no defender and no help. Coward! I will never go! (All rush upon her. Struggles.) Help! Help!! Herward!!! Save me Herward!!!! (Drag her out.)

Scene changes to the camp in the woods.

HERWARD.—Who will say that Herward fears the shock of strife and bloodshed? My soul is eager for the fray. Down! down! *unwelcome* thoughts that crowd my brain like ghostly visitors who tend some funeral train!

HULDA.—Now you please your mother, boy. Out with thy good blade, whose polished sheen has never known one drop of human blood, no dark stains to tell of bitter strife. Away with the scabbard! Give no rest until Saxons shall on Saxon ground be masters, or be no more!

HERWARD.—Tell me of the token, and of my father, too. 'Twill stir the smouldering fire that flares and flickers so fitfully now, and, like some peevish soul, turns ever to discord, and to bickerings.

HULDA.—Thy father was a Saxon, and of King Alfred's line. Thy grandsire was brave. Harold, the last of Saxon Kings, 'twas written on the domes of heaven that he should fall at Hasting's bitter fight.

HERWARD.—What was the sign?

HULDA.—A train of fire swept onward to the sun—filled half the space of heaven and shone at midday—resplendent, dazzling and grand. It was the grave of Saxon hopes, for ere the sun went down this Norman William had conquered, and Harold lay weltering in his blood.

HERWARD.—Go on, 'tis wine that gods alone can drink.

HULDA.—From a proud castle wall thy father's banner floated on the lazy breeze, and like some couchant lion, half sleeping, waking, was waiting for some puny Norman or Danish foe.

HERWARD.—Go on! Go on!! I drink the wine.

HULDA.—The banquet hall was hung with many a Danish flag, that trembled at every Saxon breath. The hearty laughter, the boistrous joke, the ever ready blades that flashed in air, when thy brave sire was toasted to the very skies. The rafters quivered at the royal shouts of brave retainers armed in proof and eager for the strife.

HERWARD.—'Tis a goodly tale, and one that stirs my sluggish blood.

HULDA.—No arm so strong to stem the bloody tide of battle that ebbed and flowed like some eternal sea. His black and heavy plume waved in every battle breeze, and never yet did Norman or Danish ranks stand fast to meet his deadly shock.

HERWARD. My very blood does tingle to my finger tips.

HULDA.—These Norman hounds besieged his castle with thrice his beleaguered force. Such deeds of bravery were never seen. They scaled the walls, and inch by inch they fought, and fighting still fell back o'er powered. This little band fought with the madness of despair. The very ramparts were slippery with red blood, your father wounded still fought on. They fired the castle from turret to foundation stone, and for his brave defense they threw him in the flames.

HERWARD.—Great God! Could such things be--?

HULDA.—I fled, and, with you in my arms, sought refuge in an obscure Saxon home. They searched, but found us not. I gave thee to a Saxon from the South, and with thee half this ring. Alone I've pondered o'er the bloody past until my heart is stone.

HERWARD.--Where is this Norman leader? Does he still live?

HULDA.---He does, and now commands yon Norman robbers' den. Now swear upon thy Saxon oath that you will lead our Saxon allies. Four divisions from the North will soon meet us here, and with your forces well in hand the castle's ours already. Swear you will spare none. Kill as they did kill, and burn as they did burn?

HERWARD.---I swear upon my knees to live for vengeance and for thee. To lead our Saxon allies upon our Norman foes. Foremost in the fight this plume, my father wore and scorned amid the castle's smoke and flames to scorch or even die, shall wave until yon castle be a heap of smoulder-

ing ruins. Kind heaven will nerve this arm until these muscles be cords of sinewy steel.

HULDA.---To me belongs the task. While slaughter follows every blow in front I'll be behind to light the battle scene with lurid tongues of flame, and as the heavy pall of smoke obscures the dying light 'twill be to me a joy this heart has waited long to share.

HERWARD ---The commander, is he to live?

HULDA.---The scorching flames shall be his winding sheet. (*Exit Hulda.*)

HERWARD.---And now to my unhappy home. I have been too long away. Azaline, I can but love thee still, and since I have done thee great wrong, great wrongs must needs amended be. Why did I let this hell-born, jealous rage like some foul bird pollute its nest? (*Exit Herward.*)

Scene changes to Herward's home. Enter Herward calling for Azaline. Goes from room to room. Slow music.

HERWARD.---Azaline! Azaline!! Azaline!!! No answer comes to my listening ears. How still the house is! Where can she be? (Goes to the table, finds the note, opens and reads.)

Herward: When you read these tear-blotted lines I will be far away. You have wronged your little wife. God knows that I am innocent. I forgive you! I forgive you!! But can never forget. I leave our little ones to thee. For my sake you will always love them. I am too proud to ask forgiveness, for I have never done thee harm. The ring and broach you gave me are with this letter. I have no further claims upon you. Your true and loving AZALINE.

HERWARD.---Gone from me! My wife is gone! My Azaline! Could you but see me now! Unhappy heart, remorse will be thy cruel task-master now. What is this? All is confusion. Some bitter struggle. I did forget, my children, where are they? What has happened? I am stunned. I am a brutish thing. Farewell happy days, I'll banish thee to memories varied storehouse. Welcome, discord, war and strife, steel

clanging, clashing till the very sparks do light the funeral *pyre*, helmets cracked with sturdy blows. My soul is up in arms, and eager for the fray. Down! down! remorse, for like some frightful ghoul you stare and grin at me. My children, too, are gone! (Children rush in and run to Herward, hugs them both.)

HERWARD.---My children still are left me.

BOY.---Papa, where is mamma gone? Will she come back to us? I want my mamma.

GIRL.---I hate those ugly men. They made my mamma cry. You will not leave us, papa?

HERWARD.--I will stay with you, my children. I must find your mother first.

BOY.---Can we go too? Do not leave us.

GIRL.---Where has she gone? will she come back again?

HERWARD ---How can I tell, my child.

BOY.---Mamma came and kissed us oh, so often, and then some cruel men came and took her away. She called for help, called for you so many times Why did you not come?

HERWARD.-- Ah-h-h. (Springs up) Tell me, my boy, what did she say?

BOY.---You look so angry, did I do wrong?

HERWARD.---Quickly child, what did she say?

BOY.---Save me, Herward, my husband, save me.

HERWARD.---Cringing coward, and I away. The very thought, will drive me to despair. Oh-h-h! could I but launch the thunderbolts of heaven, and strike before it is too late.

GIRL.---Papa, you frighten us.

HERWARD.---I did forget, my child, Papa would not harm thee for a world of happy days, (sits down on the floor), I'll build you houses, till those little drowsy lids shall droop, and quiet sleep wipe out one day's great grief.

GIRL.---Papa, you look so strange, will mamma be here soon?

HERWARD.---Another stab from such childish hands. Go sleep and while you rest, I'll bring your mother back. (Rings

a bell, nurse enters, leads them out.) (Starts up.) I'll seek her everywhere, and should the heavy hand of death be laid upon her, I will follow, still follow thee beyond, and hand in hand we'll roam Elysian fields, and pluck the flowers of happiness, that withered at our touch on earth. Oh! Azaline, you do not answer now, are those sweet lips cold clay? To find her, I must away. (*Exit Herward.*)

Scene changes to the portcullis once more. Sentinel on post.

SENTINEL.---Halt!! unseemly hag, thy mission now is ended. For very truth thou art a safe messenger of love, since neither could grow jealous of your looks.

HULDA.---Peace, babbling fool, I asked not for advice How say you that my mission's ended.

SENTINEL.—In very truth, for yonder Norman bird is safely caged within these stout old walls.

HULDA.---You mean Saxon Herward's wife?

SENTINEL.—In very truth. She fought four sturdy men at arms. Norman blood will tell. We tied her on a litter and brought her here.

HULDA.—She wished not to come?

SENTINEL.--In good truth, she did not. Willing or unwilling, she is now a prisoner here. Booty and beauty, 'tis a soldier's prize. Thy ill-favored face will always save thee from both, unless it be to frighten carrion birds or timid children.

HULDA.—Then is the castle doomed—see I have my passport.

SENTINEL.—'Tis well. Pass in—but mark you, no more dismal hootings—raven croakings—to mar the feelings of these quiet, gentle folks.

HULDA.—What is that to thee? Thou canst not change relentless fate. 'Tis written in the star-lit glimmer of yon distant space.

Scene changes to the Castle hall. Lords and Ladies all assembled. Enter Hulda.

BERTRAM.—What evil day brought thee again?

HULDA.—'Tis well to ask. Thou canst tell me. Is not the Norman bird already caged?

BERTRAM.—To claim thy promise then?

HULDA.—I claim no promise of thee now, and come to help thee in thy suit. Does Herward's wife take kindly to the change?

BERTRAM.—My wooing goes not well—a close prisoner—she hates the very name of Norman.

HULDA.—You are too hasty, Sir Bertram. Assume deep melancholy, sigh and sigh again, and play the love-sick fool. For not by threats, or fear, will you ever win.

BERTRAM.—If thou canst win her for me, I will fill thy purse with gold.

HULDA.—I can but try.

BERTRAM.—How will you commence?

HULDA.—Fill her mind with stories well and truly told. Make her believe that Herward's false. Leave all to me. I must have access to her presence.

BERTRAM.—'Tis well, and now I will excuse thy presence. When without a page will show thee too her room.

AUBREY.—Old hag, does fortune smile to-day, or is the sky o'ercast with sombre clouds? Lady Clare, there is better cheer in store for thee. Stretch forth thy velvet palm and let life's traceries their story tell.

LADY CLARE.—Away with such soothsayers! Her disma. croakings haunt me still. I want no more of such.

AUBREY.—Get thee hence! Brave fortune finds a mouthpiece more suited to its rank.

HULDA.—I but ask the leave.

BERTRAM.—(Rings. Page enters.) Show this hag to the room wherein my captured bird is safely caged. (*Exit Hulda.*)

PAGE.—This way, old woman. Come—move up, you step too slow.

(*All this aside as she goes out.*)

HULDA.—Fool, laugh, be merry, and drink wine. The peep of coming doom already sends its lurid glare to light thy pathway to the tomb, and such a tomb, in ages yet to come you will your story tell, and blanch the cheek with coming haggard fear and marble pallor.

PAGE.—What do you say? Move faster! We will never reach the room!

HULDA.—Slowly, good page, time flies too fast for thee. Perhaps you would wish to clog the rapid wheel that hurries thee to death and gloom.

Scene changes to a room in the Castle. Azaline seated at a table. Head bowed down. Knocks at the door.

AZALINE.—I have no power to bid thee stay. Oh, Herward! did you but know my fate, could come quickly and save me from this fate far worse than death!

HULDA.—(Touches her on the shoulder. Azaline starts—screams.) Peace, child! It is I.

AZALINE.—Why do you torment me thus? Why persecute me with thy presence? Out of my sight! You have done me wrong enough already! Robbed me of my noble husband's love and sold me to a villain!

HULDA.—Leave us good page. It is thy master's orders. (*Exit Page.*) Weep not my child, but listen well. I hated you because you were in my way. Herward now loves you better than his life. (Silence.) I know thee now. I feared thy Norman blood. Swear to me you will never tell.

AZALINE.—You do but mock me. What do you wish? I swear by Herward's love!

HULDA.—Within a week the castle will be stormed. A Herward to the rescue! I have known grief enough to crush a thousand like thy puny self. The commander of the castle is my bitter foe. He threw my wounded husband's body in the castle's burning flames. As you already know, Herward is my only son, and well the mantle of his father rests upon his strong and sturdy arm.

AZALINE.—Go on. I listen.

HILDA.—You were the feeble pivot on which my hot revenge did turn. I tried thee. Found you pure as virgin gold. I saw that Herward's life was wrapt in thee. To bring discord, would bring me quick success. You know the rest.

AZALINE.—And for this reason, I am here?

HULDA.—Be silent. Look well, and note the leader of these Saxon clans, for 'tis thy Herward's self. Mark the plum that waves above his kingly head. It has braved many a warlike gale upon his father's head. Never yet a foeman stood up before it and did live. Mounting on the castle's smoke, that crowned the cruel flames below, it scorned to die, while his brave heart was scorched and burned in fiery heat. Look well upon this waving plume, 'twill give thee liberty or seal thy doom.

AZALINE.—How will he know I am here?

HULDA.—Write him. I'll be the bearer and place it in his hands myself. 'Twill lend a thousand furies to his apathetic, sluggish soul. To know you live, and are a prisoner here, the very walls will crumble at his touch

AZALINE.—I could almost love thee for the joy you bring!

HULDA.—Write! I am waiting. 'Tis not for thee, poor, foolish child. You serve my object well, and therefore live.

AZALINE.—(Writes.) If you still love me, save me, ere it be too late! I am a close prisoner here, insulted by this Bertram. Come to me! Come to your wife. AZALINE.

HULDA.—'Tis a goodly note, and will bring brave blows—good blood will flow. Take this dagger, perchance 'twill save thee, when all else fails. You are my brave boy's wife. You have the courage, child.

AZALINE.—Death, calm death, is welcome to my couch. Dishonor, never! (Conceals the dagger.)

HULDA.—I could almost love thee, child. Fear not, he will not molest thee till we come. And now good bye. (Takes the note and retires.)

AZALINE.---I distrust her. Perchance some new misfortune follows close upon the last. How can I fathom hate's abyss? Kind heaven will shield me from all this and give me back the life and love my very soul did feed upon. (*Exit.*)

Scene in the camp of Saxons. Soldiers grouped around.

HERWARD.---Cedric! (Advances and touches his cap.) Is the third watch well posted? Let no one pass the lines Mark you, should old Hulda come show her to my tent at once.

CEDRIC.---It shall be done. (Retires.)

HERWARD.---There is a heaviness of heart that suits not well the leader of this Saxon host, My weary heart does follow close upon my lagging footsteps, and only fight, that I may float on oblivion's dreamy sea. Where is my wife to-night? The echoing winds but mock me with the answer--Where? She was sore beset! Oh could my tempered steel but reach his coward heart! Why was I away? Oh, Azäline! I have basely wronged you! (Hulda touches him on the shoulder.)

HULDA.---Be not cast down! Your wife still lives. These very eyes have seen her, and these wrinkled hands can give thee joy. I have a letter for thee.

HERWARD.--The gods know well I thank thee, mother. Give me the letter, quick!

HULDA.--This Norman Bertram did seize upon thy wife. She is now a prisoner in the castle and calls for thee to save her ere it be too late. The absent dove flies quickly to its mate.

HERWARD.--The letter! (Hulda hands it to him. Seizes and reads.) She is a prisoner. Every moment is an age, and every age a thousand years. Up! my men! Close up your steady ranks and buckle tight your harness!

HULDA.--Hold! madman! You will ruin all! You speak not like a leader, but some rash and ill advised fool. This Bertram pressed his suit. I have his promise. He will not molest her till we meet again. Leave all to me.

HERWARD.---Well, so let it be. And thou didst see her, my mother. How looked she? Well I hope?

HULDA.---Does the pinioned-fettered bird, who pines to join its mate and break the prison bars, look well? She loves thee Herward, and bravely faces every foe.

HERWARD.---Why do you give me cruel blows? and throw a coward's gauntlet at my feet? You curb the warlike steed that frets and paws the earth, impatient to be gone.

HULDA.---Time enough to measure strength and blows. To-morrow will be the day. And should we fail, 'twill be a martyr's glorious grave, and Saxon England will be no more. (*Exit Hulda.*)

HERWARD.---Call my Captains up, we'll lay our plans for siege, and on the morrow storm the castle. (Captains enter.) Have we scaling ladders for our force?

FIRST CAPTAIN.---We have, and men to mount them to the very top.

HERWARD.---Bravely said. With such leaders the castle's ours already. We will attack four sides at once. This will divide and weaken well their force. Let our archers advance in front and cover well the walls. Send every arrow through a Norman visor's bars. Under cover of this cloud of arrows we will advance in heavy force and batter down the postern. The court and castle shall be ours, or heaps of Saxon slain shall mark the spot where freemen vainly fought, and fighting bravely fell. Lend a thousand furies to each blow, and strike for Saxon rule! (Curtain falls.)

Scene changes to a room in the Castle. Azaline a prisoner.

AZALINE.---I have no precious tidings of my lord. Oh heavy heart! where is the hope that deadens silent grief? Every hour seems an awful age. Why does he not come?

ATTENDANT.---Cheer up my Lady, my Lord of Bertram dearly loves thee; he will soon be here.

AZALINE.---Poor, simple-hearted child, I can but smile to think how little you can read my longing heart. I love not your Norman knight. I have a husband now.

ATTENDANT.—You love not Sir Bertram then? and he a titled Lord! You must be crazed indeed. From many a battle field, where slaughter followed hand in hand with death, his praises have been sung by minstrel's lay, To throw such love away!

AZALINE.—You have a tender spot within your childish heart for this Bertram. Speak, do I not reason well?

ATTENDANT.—Alas! he loves me not! These eyes have looked a very wealth of love, and to no purpose. He deigns me not a single glance.

AZALINE.—I pity thee, indeed, my Norman child. For like some modest woodland flower, in a far off peaceful dale, 'twill droop and die unknown. Waste not one single thought upon so false a churl. He tore me from my home and childrens' love. (Walks backward and forward excitedly.)

AZALINE.—Why do they not come? My very brain is in a whirl! My pulse outstrips the courser's speed!

ATTENDANT.—You are excited, Lady. Who do you expect will come? This cage is surely strong.

AZALINE.—One who should be here before the night comes on. You fret me child. Be silent.

ATTENDANT.—'Tis for thee fair lady, not myself.

AZALINE.—Why do you care for me, if Bertram loves me? I should be your bitter foe. Help me to escape, and all this wealth of love I freely give to thee.

ATTENDANT.—I have my orders unto death. His slightest wish would be strictest law. I am here to watch thy every move. Have I not obeyed?

AZALINE.—Who can gainsay? You have served your master well. (Goes to the window.) A hundred times within the hour I've gazed upon those silent, gloomy woods that appear so far removed, and to my faltering faith seem distant as the stars. (An arrow shot through the window with a note tied to it falls at Azaline's feet.) Kind heaven, I bless thee! (Picks up the arrow.) Strange and dreadful messenger, a hundred deaths are gleaming from your glittering point. How

welcome to this anxious heart! (Unties the note. Reads.

A Herward to the rescue. We will attack the castle at once in heavy force. Let no random arrow strike thee down. Methinks a legion of brave hearts are bounding in my breast. Nothing can keep me from you. HERWARD.

ATTENDANT.—What means all this? We are betrayed. To the commander, I will report.

AZALINE.—You will not!! (Stands before her.)

ATTENDANT.—Out of my way, every moment is an age.

AZALINE.—Never!! You shall not leave the room alive, and tell the tale. (Draws the dagger, stands before the door.) One step and it shall be your last.

ATTENDANT.—Do not kill me.

AZALINE.—Then obey. Obedience is thy very life.

ATTENDANT.—What shall I do?

AZALINE.—As I command—to the opening what dost thou see?

ATTENDANT.—The woods are all alive with men.

AZALINE.—Who is their leader, child?

ATTENDANT.—A stalwart knight with visor down, a heavy plume like some ill-omened bird, is waving o'er his haughty head.

AZALINE.—They of the castle, what do they?

ATTENDANT.—Hurrying to and fro, they mann the walls, and harness as they go.

AZALINE.—God of our fathers and the brave protect and save him, for he is my husband.

ATTENDANT.—I can see nothing now, the arrows fly so thick, and death in every shaft. They plant ladders against the walls and climb to meet their death like brave and fearless men. Their doom is sealed—no they reach the very top and clamber o'er the walls like bees.

AZALINE.—What of the leader? This suspense is cruel torture to my soul.

ATTENDANT.—He of the sable plume advances with a heavy force, and battle ax in hand, would cleave the very

gates in twain. They bear a heavy oaken beam, such blows the postern shakes---is driven from its fastenings, and is down.

AZALINE.—Tell me, child, does he still live.

ATTENDANT.—And fighting with the fury of a thousand Lions all at bay. They have gained the outer wall, and horror rules this bloody day, the Norman ranks do waver and grow thin.

AZALINE.—At the postern, child, what do they there?

ATTENDANT.—'Tis carnage, blood, and bitter strife, hear you not the Saxon battle-cry. St. Denis and our lady from the Norman side. The sound of clashing steel. the fury of the fray. How will it end? They are falling back, they are falling back.

AZALINE.—Who, child! which side?

ATTENDANT.—The Normans are slowly giving way and fighting with the madness born of grim despair.

AZALINE.--Speak, does he still lead them---is he dead or dying, my very heart stands still.

ATTENDANT.---He is everywhere, and courting death as some coy lass. Fate so decrees that he shall live. The tide of battle sweeps this way. God of the just, the castle is in flames, as if to double horrors insatiate, cruel and remorseless greed. (An arrow flies through the window, strikes the attendant down,) (attendant falls.)

AZALINE.---Gone! Why not have spared the guileless heart, that blossomed and exhaled its innocence.

ATTENDANT.---Raise my head, death's darkness is around, and soon it will enwrap me in his eternal arms. Kiss me for him and tell him that I loved him---loved him, my last thoughts were all his own. (Dies.)

AZALINE.---The clashing sound comes nearer. (Starts up, the door bursts open, Bertram enters, sword in hand, panting.)

BERTRAM.---My breath is shorter than my time. Come we have little time to loose, the flames and Saxons follow close. (Advances to seize her.)

AZALINE.---Advance one step, and life's struggle with me will soon be o'er. (Raises the dagger to kill herself.)

AZALINE.---Help! help!! Herward!!! save me!!!

(Herward dashes in sword in hand. Bertram moves to the other end of the stage, glare at each other.)

HERWARD.---Well met, my Norman robber. I sought you in the thickest of the fray, my good sword is red with slaughter now and reeks with Norman blood, the basest is the last

BERTRAM.---My blood is thine, if thou canst let the life stream flow.

[They fight backward and forward. Azaline huddles in the corner. Herward disarms and runs him through. Bertram falls.]

HERWARD.---The dog is dead, and well he should be, for he has done me wrong, dearly has he paid the debt.

AZALINE.---Saved, and by my noble husband's arm. (Rush into each other's arms.)

HERWARD.---God be praised.

HULDA.---(Rushes in.) The commander now is dead, and roasts in yonder sea of molten flame and now my oath grown old with fleeting years, has been fulfilled. Away the flames are spreading and soon a smoking heap of ruins will mark this spot, and tell them 'twas for Hulda and Revenge.

End of play. Curtain falls.

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